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SAUDI ARABIA: Views on the Peace Process

Leaders in Saudi Arabia are anxious to enlist US help to narrow the gap between the new Arab peace plan and the US initiative, but they are reluctant to press PLO chairman Yasir Arafat for further concessions without some modification of US policy toward the PLO.

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Crown Prince Abdallah and Defense Minister Sultan told Ambassador Murphy earlier this week that the US should drop its refusal to negotiate with the PLO in order to maintain the momentum of the peace process. Another senior Saudi official indicated that without some concrete US gesture toward the PLO, the Saudis would find it difficult to persuade Arafat to support the US initiative and to empower King Hussein to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians.

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The Saudis believe that Arafat is in a strong position now and that his inclusion in an anticipated Arab League mission to Washington would enhance his ability to soften Palestinian demands. Abdallah implied, however, that, to avoid jeopardizing the Arab League mission, the Saudi Government will not insist on Arafat's inclusion in the delegation.

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Comment: Saudi leaders clearly have tailored their remarks to influence US policy. Still, their comments also reflect fear that the Arab initiative will fail and that radical forces will regain the upper hand in the Palestinian movement and the Arab world. In addition, King Fahd probably is concerned that Saudi influence with other Arab states and his ability to chart Saudi policy will be weakened if he is unable to capitalize on his close ties to the US.

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State Dept. review completed

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